Writing a Spiritual Biography in Early Modern France:

The "Many Lives"[1] of Madeleine de Lamoignon

In the early 1690s, in the convent of the Visitation de Sainte-Marie in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Jacques, a nun named Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon (b.1654-1734) began to write the life of her recently deceased aunt, Madeleine de Lamoignon (1609-1687).[2] Madeleine was part of the second generation of devout Parisian laywomen, known as *dévotes* (the devout) who helped to drive the spiritual revival associated with the French Counter Reformation. In the early seventeenth century, Madeleine made a resolution to devote her life to serving the poor but outside of the constraints of marriage. She became one of the most committed members of Louise de Marillac (1591-1660) and Vincent de Paul's (1581-1660) confraternity, the Ladies of Charity (*Dames de la charité*), for whom her mother had served as president between 1643 and 1651.[3] The Ladies provided financial and political support for the charitable works of the now well-studied Daughters of Charity (*Filles de la charité*), established by De Paul and De Marillac in 1633.[4] Madeleine played a pivotal role in the provision of charity and social welfare in early modern Paris after she opened a clothing and food "bank" for the poor at her own home.

Shortly after Madeleine's death, her niece set out to write a biography which would capture the benevolence of her aunt; this was to be a spiritual biography, a relation of a

---

[1] This is a reference to the title of a 1999 seminal article by Jodi Bilinkoff, "The 'Many' Lives of Pedro de Ribadeneyra."

[2] Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), Archives Privées (hereafter AP), AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon, religieuse aux filles de Sainte-Marie, du faubourg Saint-Jacques. "

[3] The *Dames de la Charité* received some extensive treatment in Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, and Madeleine is discussed at 239-240.

[4] The most recent works on the confraternity of the *Filles* are Brejon de Lavergnée, *Des Filles de la Charité*; Brejon de Lavergnée, *Histoire des Filles de la Charité*. See also Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief* and Peake, "The Daughters of Charity."

devotional life. The spiritual biography was, in early modern Europe, a flourishing form of religious literature and France contributed prolifically to the genre. [5] Lives (*vitae*) were circulated in manuscript form within convents and among circles of pious readers, as well as being increasingly disseminated more widely via the printing press. Spiritual biographies were, of course, close cousins of saints' lives and were typically hagiographical in tone. They were, as Éric Suire has revealed, often used as evidence in canonisation proceedings for the creation of official saints.[6] Yet lives were also penned about those who never received recognition: unofficial saints, as well as failed saints, or "losers" as one scholar has put it.[7] Nuns were dynamic contributors to the feminine spiritual biography in France, as the recent work of Jacques Le Brun has illuminated. According to Le Brun, biographies produced within female religious houses number well into the thousands.[8] The spiritual biographies of lay women such as Madeleine de Lamoignon do not survive in such copious numbers, but their study helps to reveal more complex textual genealogies than convent records might suggest. [9]

---

[5] Bilinkoff, "Confessors, Penitents and the Construction of Identities," 83 and 94 on their popularity. Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, 33.

[6] Suire, *La Saintété Française*.

[7] "Losers" (perdenti) is Miguel Gotor's term, cited in Schutte, "Ecco la santa!" 114.

8 Le Brun, *Soeur et amante*. For Le Brun's work on biographies, see also "Cancer serpit," 9-31; "L'institution et le corps," 111-121; and "Conversion et continuité intérieures," 317-35. Spiritual biographies of lay women in this period do, nevertheless, survive in both print and manuscript. Examples of more well-known printed lives of lay female charitable patrons in this period are: Faydeau, *La Lumière cachée*; Bauduen, *La Vie admirable de... Charlotte-Marguerite de Gond*y. Spiritual biographies of lay women in this period do, nevertheless, survive in both print and manuscript. Examples of more well-known printed lives of lay female charitable patrons in this period are: Faydeau, *La Lumière cachée*; Bauduen, *La Vie admirable de... Charlotte-Marguerite de Gond*y.

[9] Spiritual biographies of lay women in this period do, nevertheless, survive in both print and manuscript. Examples of more well-known printed lives of lay female charitable patrons in this period are: Faydeau, *La Lumière cachée*; Bauduen, *La Vie admirable de... Charlotte-Marguerite de Gond*y.

Madeleine de Lamoignon was the subject of four surviving unpublished spiritual biographies, whose diversity permits the process of writing *vitae* to be excavated. The first part of the article thus establishes the different authorial voices in the "lives" of Madeleine de Lamoignon and considers how their interventions were layered over time. The manuscripts also allow us to gauge how her biographers sought to reconcile Madeleine's lay status with their own conceptions of feminine saintliness. The second strand of the article therefore turns its attention to the editing strategies adopted by each of Madeleine's biographers, including her own Visitandine niece, in the reproduction of her personal autobiographical writings. The status, gender, and positioning of the biographers, it is argued, produced four distinct accounts which each accentuated and downplayed different elements of Madeleine's life. This analysis of the authors and their approaches to writing a life is developed in the final portion of the article which considers their respective treatments of Madeleine's "holy death."

Ultimately, this article contends that each of Madeleine's biographers were grappling with her position as a lay woman in the world who had pursued spiritual perfection outside of the cloister and marriage. This reconstruction of the collaborative and fluid nature of Madeleine de Lamoignon's spiritual biography reveals a number of competing conceptions of lay female sanctity in the long Counter-Reformation. Madeleine was cast variously by her biographers as a charitable patron, mystical writer, submissive penitent and saintly protégé of Teresa of Ávila.

Excavating the Writing Process

Historians of female *dévotes* in Counter-Reformation Paris have been aware of at least one extant spiritual biography of Madeleine de Lamoignon. This life spans 161 folios and was penned by an

anonymous Jesuit author.[10] Its dedicatory preface and Latin subtitle suggests that it was probably a presentation copy of the life for manuscript circulation.[11] Barbara Diefendorf made use of this particular document to prove the scope of Madeleine's charitable work in seventeenth-century Paris:[12]

> Using tropes common to saints' lives, Madeleine's biographer depicts her as heroically embracing a difficult path, one that would set her at odds with social conventions and potentially even endanger her family's good name. Clearly, he intended her life to inspire admiration rather than direct imitation. And yet the very fact that a cleric could write admiringly of Madeleine de Lamoignon's vocation, praising both her private efforts to assist the poor and her more public role raising funds for war relief and the Dames' other charitable causes, underscores the legitimacy that a life of determined Christian service had acquired by the second half of the seventeenth century.[13]

Representing the life of an unmarried lay woman as a sanctifying spiritual path certainly was dangerous territory for a male spiritual biographer. Even if many women in early modern Europe did choose the "unofficial third vocation" as "devout laywomen" in the liminal space between

[10] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, (hereafter BnF), Manuscrits Fonds Français (hereafter MS. Fr.), 14342.

[11] The subheading on the title page is taken from Psalm 41: "Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem in die mala liberabit eum domus."

[12] Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 239.

[13] Ibid., 240.

convent and the world, spiritual biographers had to handle their abjuration of religious vows extremely sensitively.[14]

Mirroring broader patterns elsewhere in Europe during this period, in France there were a number of such biographies published by confessor-spiritual directors about their lay female penitents.[15] It might be tempting to assume, then, that the anonymous Jesuit who seemingly attempted to legitimise Madeleine's spiritual path was the confessor-spiritual director who oversaw the final years of her life: the Père Dubois. Dubois was a Jesuit who attended to Madeleine at her death bed, along with Louis Bourdaloue (1632-1704). A comparison of the anonymised presentation manuscript with a second extant life in the Lamoignon private archives reveals, however, that Dubois was not Madeleine's biographer.[16] This second manuscript is in the same hand as the anonymous life but replete with corrections and additions and appears to have been an earlier draft. The title page of this version of the biography attributes authorship to the "révérend père d'Orléans." No further details about the biographer are given here, but a further third extant copy of the same text reveals his identity to be Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans (1641-1698).[17] Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans was a Jesuit historian and author of a number of other (mostly Jesuit) *vitae* including the life of Pierre Coton (1564-1626), Louis XIII's confessor.[18]

As well as uncovering the authorship of the anonymous biography, the Lamoignon family archive also contains two lives of Madeleine by female biographers which pre-date that of the Jesuit. From these documents, it is possible to conclude that the seemingly definitive Jesuit-

---

[14] Weber, "Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World," 16.

[15] See, for example, S. Martin de La Porte, *L'idée de la véritable et solide dévotion*.

[16] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par le R.P.d'Orléans. "

[17] The other version is at BnF, Ms. FR. 23985. This copy of Madeleine's life by the Jesuit appears to be a copy. This repository also contains a series of memoirs which were intended to supply a life of Madeleine's brother, Guillaume de Lamoignon (1617-77).

[18] Some of his works include *La Vie du B. Stanislas Kostka*; *La Vie du P. Charles Spinola*; *La Vie du Père Pierre Coton*.

authored life of Madeleine de Lamoignon had a more convoluted genealogy as a bricolage of earlier lives by women Madeleine had encountered, and inspired, as a Lady of Charity. The first female biographer that the Jesuit author borrowed from is difficult to identify. A note on the manuscript identifies her simply as "Madame Teste."[19] Madeleine had worked with one "Mademoiselle Teste" in the confraternity of the Ladies of Charity.[20] It is impossible to be certain if this is the very same "Teste," but it is not inconceivable. The lives of "third status" (*il terzo stato*) women represented a substantial subgenre of lay female spiritual biography in France, and we know fellow lay women wrote some.[21] Furthermore, we learn from the preface that this biographer was responding to the recent printing of a spiritual biography of Vincent de Paul.[22] Madame Teste had read this biography and discovered references to the virtues of one of De Paul's most steadfast Ladies of Charity, Madeleine's mother Marie Deslandes, which had

[19] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon, anonyme. " It is noted on the title page "perhaps by Madame Teste." This life attributed to "Madame Teste" is almost certainly a later copy, perhaps in the hands of one of the Visitandine sisters and was probably attributed to her by them.

[20] Brejon de Lavergnée, *Histoire des Filles de la Charité*, 8.

[21] The "third status" was Gabriella Zarri's phrase in "The Third Status," in 181-99. For examples of spiritual biographies of French women of the "third status", see Le Martre, *La Vie mêlée*. Another example is Anne de Xainctonge (1567-1621) who was the subject of a number of intersecting and overlapping biographies by male and female biographers; see the work of Le Bourgeois, *Ursulines d'Anne de Xainctonge*. For another Parisian life written by a laywoman, see Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS. 2489, "Mémoires pour servir à la vie de Madame de Miramion," which outlined the life of Marie de Miramion later published by the abbé de Choisy and has been attributed to her daughter, Marguérite. This hand in this extant manuscript looks like a later copy but is cited as the work of Marguérite in Gude, "Madame de Miramion," 238-51. For the later published version which appears to have been based on these memoirs by Miramion's daughter, see Choisy, *La Vie de Madame de Miramion*.

[22] Louis Abelly's (1604-91) *La Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu*.

motivated her to write Madeleine's life. The fact that this biographer was someone close to Vincent de Paul might point to her identity as a fellow Lady of Charity.[23]

The second female biographer who wrote Madeleine's life is more easily identifiable as Sister Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon: the Visitandine niece of Madeleine de Lamoignon with whom this article started.[24] The nun who later became superior of the second Visitation convent in Paris made references to an existing "life" by "Madame Teste" throughout her composition and was rather frank about its deficiencies.[25] The manuscript is attributed to the single authorship of Sister Anne-Élisabeth and contains only one hand, but it also shows signs of being the product of a more collective enterprise—as was often the case with convent writing.[26] Although the Jesuit biographer appears to have had access to both Teste's and Sister Anne-Élisabeth's versions of Madeleine's life, it is clear that the Visitandine version was the real blueprint for his later redaction.

Significantly, however, Madeleine's Visitandine niece did not envisage even the Jesuit's edition of Madeleine's "life" as the final, definitive biography. It is possible to trace the nun's efforts to procure a fourth biographer in the early years of the eighteenth century. In 1703, Sister Anne-Élisabeth, along with some of her fellow Visitandine sisters, corresponded with Jacques Marsollier (1647-1724) about the production of another life. Marsollier was a canon regular from

---

[23] This first version of Madeleine's spiritual biography is 92 folios long, and it makes regular allusions to the "vie" of Vincent de Paul in marginal annotations; AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon, anonyme," fols. 2 and 12 are examples of this.

[24] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon, religieuse aux filles de Sainte-Marie, du faubourg Saint-Jacques."

[25] AN, 399/AP/5, on fol. 75, she acknowledges the discussion "Madame Teste" made of Marie-Louise de Gonzague.

[26] Convent chronicles and collectively-authored "sisterbooks" produced in the German context are both examples of this: Lowe, *Nuns Chronicles and Convent Culture*, 36-37. On collective writing in the convent, see also Bowden, "Collecting the Lives of Early Modern Women Religious," 7–20 and Goodrich, "Nuns and Community-Centred Writing," 287-303.

the abbey of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris and later prebendary of Uzès Cathedral. Anne-Élisabeth wrote to Marsollier on February 8, 1703 expressing her enthusiasm for the project: "we are eagerly awaiting the work which is the product of your quill and your kindness for our family."[27] She also highlighted the place of her aunt in the recent biography of Vincent de Paul: "Look here, monsieur, in the life of Monsieur Vincent where you will find my late dear aunt in many places."[28] In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century there was renewed interest in the life of Vincent de Paul because of a new beatification cause which may have, at least in part, motivated the writing of Madeleine's biography.[29] Also, as ecclesiastical superior to the two Parisian Visitation houses, Vincent de Paul had an affiliation with the convent where Madeleine's niece was writing.

In this milieu, another Visitandine nun, Marie de Chandenier, also wrote to Marsollier with a similar supplication.[30] She described Madeleine's biography as "the work they preferred above all others," and she asked God to bless Marsollier for this "holy enterprise."[31] The authorial reputation of Marsollier is crucial for clarifying the motives of the Visitandine nuns. He was known as a theologian, but also as a historian and hagiographer who had authored several published *vitae*. These included a biography of Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier, the abbot of Rancé (1626-1700), and notably, biographies of the recently canonised (1665) François de Sales (1567-

[27] AN, 399/AP/5, Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon to M. Marsollier, 8 Feb. 1703.
[28] AN, 399/AP/5, Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon to M. Marsollier.
[29] See Smith, *Fealty and Fidelity* and Burkardt, "Filles de la Charité," 335-60.
[30] This appears to have been Marie-Henriette de Chandenier de Rochechouart who had been elected superior of the Visitation house in 1670, 1673, 1691, and 1691, and was closely connected to Vincent de Paul. Marie-Louise de Chandenier had died in 1694, so she could not have been the correspondent. The other Chandenier nun at the second house of the Visitation in Paris was known in religion as Catherine-Henriette; Coste, *Vincent de Paul*, 71, n. 4.
[31] AN, 399/AP/5, Marie de Chandenier to M. Marsolier, undated.

1622) and Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641).[32] Marsollier did indeed take up the task of writing Madeleine's spiritual biography in 1703 and penned another version of her life which is extant in manuscript. This definitive version of the biography was divided into three "books" following a loose chronological thread.[33] It too was never published but quite probably enjoyed circulation and readership in manuscript.

A final stage to the project, in autumn 1703, involved a fifth contributor. In October that year, Marsollier was supplied with piecemeal texts to help with the construction of the life. Among these were the memoirs of Chrétien-François de Lamoignon (1644-1709), who was Madeleine's nephew and brother of Sister Anne-Élisabeth.[34] His original memoirs survive in the family private archives alongside a letter from Marsollier to Anne-Élisabeth. Marsollier's correspondence uncovers this final stage in the writing of the biography by revealing that Madeleine's nephew was sourcing histories of "what had happened in France since the birth of Mademoiselle de Lamoignon up to the marriage of the King," alongside accounts of events "in Poland on the occasion of the Swedish War" and, finally, "in England on the subject of the death of Charles I."[35] Marsollier repaid his efforts by affording Chrétien-François a larger place in his aunt's life than previous biographers had as well as using his historical research to flesh out the

[32] Marsollier, *La Vie de St François de Sales*; *La Vie de Dom Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé*; *La Vie de la venerable mere de Chantal*.

[33] Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (hereafter BSG), Ms. 4232, "La vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par Mr Marsollier chanoine de l'eglise de cathedral d'Usez, Paris, 1703. " Fol. 139 onwards is the start of the "second book" which starts with a long account of her mother's death and the impact of that on her; fol. 327 marks the start of the "third book" which is the final part of the life.

[34] AN, 399/AP/5, "Memoires du President de Lamoignon sur sa tante Mlle de Lamoignon communiquées en 1703 à l'abbe Marsolier en vueu de lui permettre la redaction d'une vie de Mlle de L[amoignon] (Original de la main du President de L[amoignon] et copie)."

[35] AN, 399/AP/5, Marsollier to Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon, 4 Oct. 1703.

chronological narrative.[36] Marsollier was, nonetheless, attentive to Madeleine's saintly virtues. He assured Anne-Élisabeth in his letter that he would aim to convey the extraordinary piety of her "incomparable aunt" and that he felt "edified" by what he had learned about the "eminent piety" of her "illustrious ancestor" and "holy aunt" from her brother.[37] As Madeleine's final biographer, Marsollier had a selection of sources available to him and drew upon material from Vincent de Paul's correspondence, too.[38] Significantly, Marsollier also accessed material from many of the earlier biographies of Madeleine, Marsollier's text was thus also a patchwork of material gleaned from the lives already at his disposal.[39]

The surviving correspondence does not reveal precisely why the Lamoignon family were pursuing another edition of Madeleine's biography in 1703, but it is possible to suggest some tentative explanations. Firstly, Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans's death in 1698 might have prompted the nuns to seek another credible (male?) author to collate the writings, edit the life further, and get it published. Another possibility is that the family were dissatisfied with the biography the Jesuit produced. The Lamoignon wanted a biography which brought out more strongly those aspects of

[36] BSG, Ms. 4232, see fol. 127 on the death of Charles I of England; fols. 128-29 on Catholic exiles in Paris; fol. 130 Madeleine's role in securing charity for them as refugees; fol. 135 on the war between France and Spain; and fol. 138 for Marsollier's reference to this as a "history."

[37] AN, 399/AP/5, Marsollier to Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon, 4 Oct. 1703.

[38] BSG, Ms. 4232, on fol. 125 is Marsolier's reference to a letter of Vincent de Paul.

[39] For example, in his account of Madeleine's deliberations over which path she would take and her eventual decision to remain unmarried in the world, Marsollier borrows heavily from the Jesuit but also embellished his gloss on her ability to use the "grace" God had given her. See for example, BSG, Ms. 4232, fols. 21-23 in Marsollier's version and BnF, MS. Fr. 14342, fols. 11-12 in the Jesuit version. Marsollier also describes the story of a comforting letter kept by Madeleine from an anonymous correspondent that she had received after the death of her mother, BSG, Ms. 4232, fols. 146-47. This was a story which was also present in Madame Teste's version, AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon, anonyme," fol. 3, as well as the other two lives.

Madeleine's interiority that had been obscured by a focus on her more well-known charitable work. Marsollier would be marginally more successful than the Jesuit in foregrounding this.

The Product of a Counter-Reformation Family

It was commonplace in this period for nuns to write the lives of their foundresses and fellow sisters but less typical for them to extend their gaze over the convent wall and write the lives of lay women even if they were family members.[40] In order to comprehend the enthusiasm of the Lamoignon nuns for writing the spiritual biography of their aunt, we must firstly situate the production of the life within the broader context of the family's place in the Parisian Counter Reformation. It is then that it becomes clear that the writing of Madeleine's "life" served a key set of overlapping familial and diplomatic interests. The Lamoignon were an ambitious family from the robe nobility who made a significant contribution to French spiritual renewal in the capital.[41] Madeleine was the daughter of Marie Deslandes (1576-1651) and Chrétien de Lamoignon (d.1636), born into a judicial family. Her father was president of the highest court in France in this period, the *Parlement* of Paris. He was also an important patron of some of Paris' newest religious foundations, including the two convents of the Visitation. The first Visitation house, situated on the rue Saint-Antoine on the right bank, was constructed by the architect François Mansart (1598-1666) and its church now survives as the Temple du Marais. Its sister house was established in 1623 on the rue Saint-Jacques in the left bank and became the convent of choice for many of the Lamoignon women. Madeleine's sibling, Élisabeth de Lamoignon

[40] There are other known examples of this, however. In Cambrai, one of Lady Falkland's daughters wrote her biography. This has been edited by Ferguson and Weller, *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

[41] On the family more generally, see Vian, *Les Lamoignon*.

(1608-1658), took vows there and became known in religion as Marie-Élisabeth.[42] Madeleine's eldest sister had an equally pious reputation; Anne de Lamoignon (1605-1663) married and remained in the world as a benevolent lay *dévote*.

The piety of the Lamoignon family was celebrated by their devout brother, Guillaume de Lamoignon (1617-1677), who had a prominent, public role in charitable medical provision in the seventeenth century. He was a leading member of the boards of the Paris *Hôtel-Dieu,* which had been caring for the sick poor since the seventh century, as well as the Hôpital Général established in 1656.[43] In addition to his dedication to these institutions, Guillaume was also acutely conscious of, and deeply committed to, his family's spiritual legacy.[44] In one letter apparently composed during the last months of his life on October 20, 1677 and sent to his daughters at the Visitandine house, Guillaume wrote that the Lamoignon family were united "eternally" by affection and in God's love.[45] This was something he felt was best captured by scripture in Joshua 24:15 which he quoted to his daughters in Latin: "me and my house, we will serve the Lord" ("Ego autem et domus mea serviemus Domino").[46] Elsewhere, his surviving correspondence with his Visitandine daughters between 1666 and 1676 reveals his investment in

[42] Marie-Élisabeth is referred to in the memoirs of Cardinal Mazarin's niece, Marie Mancini, in 1654 as the Visitandine sister who was responsible for her education and supervision: Nelson, *Memoires*, 88.

[43] McHugh, *Hospital Politics in Seventeenth-Century France: The Crown, Urban Elites and the Poor* (Aldershot, 2007), 155.

[44] Guillaume's role in ensuring physicians had adequate time with their patients has been recovered by McHugh, "Establishing Medical Men," 216-17.

[45] This is not an original letter in Guillaume's hand, but a copy at: Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS. 2486/4, Lettre de Monsieur le premier président de Lamoignon à mesdames ses filles religieuses de la Visitation, De l'Hermitage de Saint Nicolas, ce 20 octobre 1677, fols. 10-11.

[46] Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS. 2486/4, fol. 12.

their devotional progress, particularly during their noviciate in the convent.[47] Guillaume imagined that his daughters were committing themselves to religious vows in the name of their family as "satisfaction" for their sins, particularly for his.[48] The lengths to which the Lamoignon family went to produce a biography of their *dévote* aunt Madeleine were clearly a product of this broader socio-religious context. For a family with such a standing, spiritual biographies were not only a way to pursue a cause for formal recognition of sanctity from the Church, they were also a means of recording the spiritual legacy of the dynasty for posterity. This supports an observation that Tim McHugh made on this broader socio-political context when he argued that the involvement of families from the robe nobility in Counter-Reformation charitable projects such as those at the Parisian Hôtel-Dieu was one expression of their dynastic ambitions.[49]

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the Lamoignon family were deeply invested in the production and consumption of *vitae*. Among the male members of the Lamoignon, Chrétien-François supplied Marsollier with chronicles for the life of his aunt, as we have seen. A set of memoirs also survive Madeleine's pious brother, Guillaume.[50] The Lamoignon women, in particular, seem to have been the subject of vitae which were circulated in manuscript form. Madeleine's older sister, Anne de Lamoignon, was the subject of a biography composed in 1663 by a family friend and fellow charitable *dévote*, Marie de Miramion (1629-1696). One extant copy of the biography

[47] AN, 399/AP/3, Lettres de Guillaume de Lamoignon et sa femme Madeleine Potier à leur filles Elisabeth et Anne, religieuses aux filles de Ste Marie du Faubourg Saint Jacques. Guillaume is understood to have had two daughters at the Visitation house: Sister Anne-Élisabeth who composed one of the lives of his sister Madeleine, was one of them. Most of the letters contain the salutation "ma chere fille" which suggests that the letters were addressed to Anne-Élisabeth alone. This may have followed the death of his other Visitandine daughter.

[48] In an undated letter to one of his daughters during their noviciate, he wrote "vous vous ofrires a luy p[ou]r satisfaire p[ou]r les peche de toute votre famille particullierement pour miens qui sont en grand nombre," AN, 399/AP/3, Lettres de Guillaume de Lamoignon.

[49] McHugh, *Hospital Politics*, 59-60.

[50] BnF, MS. Fr, 23985.

was initially donated to the sisters at the Franciscan Third Order monastery of the Conception de Notre-Dame in Paris where a daughter of Anne de Lamoignon, named Olive, had taken vows.[51] A second copy of the biography is extant in the Lamoignon family private archives and was probably produced by Madeleine's Visitandine niece Anne-Élisabeth.[52] She had, at the very least, perused this copy, because she cited it in the opening passages of her own life of Madeleine, stating that "the religious of the Conception have a very edifying synopsis of her [Anne's] life."[53] The spiritual biography of her other aunt, it seems, stimulated Anne-Élisabeth and may have been the original template for the writing of Madeleine's life. The Lamoignon were thus using biographies to record the contributions their devout family members were making to the Parisian Counter-Reformation. The fact that the textual inspiration for Madeleine's "life" seems to have been a biography of her sister indicates that lay-authored biographies were being read in manuscript form within small familial and pious networks. [54]

When the production of Madeleine's biography is contextualised in this way, it also becomes less surprising that the project came to fruition within a Visitation convent. The Filles de la Visitation de Sainte-Marie (the Visitandines) was a new order established by François de Sales and his own penitent Jeanne de Chantal at Annecy in 1610. It was initially instituted as an

[51] This version survives in the BnF, at MS. Fr, 14347. It may be a later copy produced at the convent in the eighteenth century, as suggested by the hand. Olive's place in the convent is also confirmed by a document in the Parisian notarial archive, but little else is known of her. See AN, Minutier Central, ET/XIX/423, 6 Feb. 1642.

[52] AN, 399/AP/3, "Abrégé de la vie de la présidente de Nesmond par Mme de Miramion, suivi d'un codicille."

[53] AN, 399/AP/ 5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 2.

[54] In addition to the circulation of the Lamoignon and Miramion lives, other lay women in Paris were writing the lives of those connected to the families. For example, a lay female cousin of the Miramion wrote the spiritual biography of the superior of the "first" Visitation house on the rue Saint-Antoine: du Plessis, *La vie de la vénérable mère Louise-Eugénie de Fontaine*.

active uncloistered community, but in 1618 Rome enforced claustration.[55] The order became a testament to the successes of the Counter Reformation, as 149 houses were founded in the seventeenth century alone and filled mostly with sisters from the nobility and upper bourgeoisie.[56] In France, the Visitandines were also active contributors to the genre of spiritual biography, particularly through their *lettres circulaires* or obituaries which were written about deceased sisters and disseminated within the order.[57]At first glance, the motivations that the Visitandines had for writing the life of a *lay* woman are not necessarily apparent—beyond their obvious familial connections to her. Yet if we contextualise this within the broader place of the Visitation order in seventeenth-century French (and particularly Parisian) female devotional culture, their motivations become clearer. From their enclosure in 1618, Visitation convents became retreats for young and married laywomen as well as widows. As Barbara Diefendorf has explained, "François de Sales willingly gave up the right for nuns to exit the cloister in order to maintain the right of laywomen to enter, so highly did he value the lessons in piety he thought they might thereby learn."[58] Central to the Visitandine vocation was, then, interaction with lay women such as Madeleine de Lamoignon who sought refuge or spiritual direction inside the convent.

The writing of Madeleine's "life" would therefore reflect the substantial contribution that a legal family from the robe nobility made to caring for the bodies and souls of the sick poor during the French Counter Reformation. It would also simultaneously legitimate the admission

[55] Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 39.

[56] Ibid. On the Visitation order in this period, see the essays in Dompnier, *Visitation et visitandines*.

[57] Rapley, "'Un tresor enfoui, une lampe sous un boisseau'." The obituaries of both of Madeleine's Visitandine nieces survive at AN, 399/AP/3.

[58] Diefendorf, "Contradictions of the Century of Saints," 485. See also Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 179.

of pious lay benefactors such as the Lamoignon into the Visitation convent in the faubourg Saint-Jacques. These concerns coalesce particularly at various points in Sister Anne-Élisabeth's narrative. Here, Madeleine was not just presented as a valuable lay patron, but as a spiritually privileged lay retreatant. Sister Anne-Élisabeth described, for example, one occasion when Madeleine was cured of a knee complaint in the convent chapel dedicated to their "saint fondateur" De Sales.[59] Sister Anne-Élisabeth was a highly adept biographer in this regard, and in her construction of Madeleine as the saintly lay *dévote*, she successfully merged her familial and institutional interests.

That Madeleine's enterprising Visitandine niece(s) were architects in the writing of her life chimes with a burgeoning body of scholarship on female religious writing across a number of orders.[60] Nuns have been revealed to be influential and productive writers and letter-writers. Convents were not only producing biographies, but a whole range of devotional, literary and administrative texts.[61] The historiography of nuns exiled on the continent is especially rich in this area and has uncovered a transnational, textual Catholic community.[62] A more recent theme in this field has been to recover the reception of female-authored texts and the processes of copying and translation which made their circulation in manuscript possible.[63] The evidence presented in

[59] AN, 399/AP/ 5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 134.

[60] See, for example, "Collection Mectildiana," the major project on the writings of the Benedictine Catherine de Bar, Mère Mectilde du Saint-Sacrement (1614-1698) directed by Daniel-Odon Hurel and Joël Letellier, o.s.b; Poutet, *Catherine de Bar*.

[61] The most recent reflections on this has come from work on England, see Lay, *Beyond the Cloister*, 1.

[62] See the essay collection Bowden and Kelly, *The English Convents in Exile*; Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*; and Goodrich, *Faithful Translators*. On transnational communities of nuns, see Coolahan, "Identity Politics and Nuns' Writings," 306-20. On Irish nuns, see Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, especially chapter 2.

[63] Coolahan, "Reception, Reputation and Early Modern Women's Missing Texts," 3-14 and "Transnational Reception and Early Modern Women's Lost Texts," 261-70. This theme is

this article for the reading and writing of female lives at the Visitandine house in Paris should be regarded as part of this broader culture of female writing, editing, and collation in early modern Europe.[64] In this case, too, nuns were the orchestrators of a writing project which involved their collaboration with lay women and male clerics. They were also reading the biographies of other lay women and quite possibly playing a part in their circulation. Moreover, this case study also exemplifies a pattern which other scholars have identified in seventeenth-century France: the gradual but growing tendency for women to assume the role of biographer.[65]

Emerging from this complex picture of authorship is a collaborative portrait of life-writing, seen here in the case of Madeleine's life. [66] The writing of a spiritual biography was collective and cumulative. This mirrors a broader pattern in spiritual biographies produced elsewhere in early modern Europe as well as texts from other devotional genres. [67] We know, for example, that the spiritual biographies of Maria Maddelena De' Pazzi (1566-1607) were re-drafted and produced different "versions" of the female saint.[68] This also reflects Darcy R. Donahue's findings in Spanish *vidas* which were often co-signed and were sometimes written in tandem through dictation.[69] What is perhaps unique about the spiritual biographies of Madeleine

---

now part of the major European Research Council-funded RECIRC project at the Moore Institute at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

[64] The work of Thomas M. Carr Jr. has helped to bring some of the French scholarship into dialogue with the Anglo-American work on convent writing, but comparative studies of French convent writing and Anglophone nuns have not yet been undertaken; see *Studies in Early Modern France: The Cloister and the World*.

[65] On this see Paige, "Enlightened (Il)literates," 129.

[66] Some of the work of literary scholars is thus helpful for thinking about the processes of writing spiritual biographies in this period. In their recent study, Amy E. Robillard and Ron Fortune observed that "when we consider the ways in which authorship is so frequently contested, we come face to face with the realities of writing, of human memory, of collaboration, of influence," *Authorship Contested*, 15. Also see Sharpe and Zwicker, *Writing Lives*, 25.

[67] Moore, "The Disappearance of an Author," 357-411.

[68] Copeland has made this point in *Maria Maddelena De' Pazzi*, 87.

[69] Donahue, "Wondrous Words," 108.

de Lamoignon is the extent and degree of revision. The writing of Madeleine's life was a gradual process of reworking across four different versions by at least five contributors (Teste, Anne-Élisabeth, Orléans, Chrétien-François, and Marsollier). Among the other discernible voices in the biographies is, of course, Madeleine's own. While none of her spiritual autobiographical writings appear to be independently extant, they were enshrined in all of the biographies via different degrees of reproduction.

"Veiled Performances:"[70] Spiritual Autobiography in the "Many Lives" of Madeleine de Lamoignon

The boundary between biography and autobiography was blurred in early modern *vitae*. In France, and elsewhere in the early modern Catholic world, biographers often claimed to be unveiling for the first time the personal spiritual writings of their subject. Biographers sometimes quoted lengthy passages from the spiritual autobiographical writings of their subjects, allowing their readers to peer through a glass darkly at the souls of virtuous biographees.[71] They often included the subject's life-writings, whether they were conversion narratives and examinations of conscience, devotional reflections and maxims, or letters. Historians have revealed that this tended to occur when biographies were composed by the male confessor-spiritual director, or "confessor-hagiographer," who wanted to promote his own skill as a

[70] This is a reference to Dyan Elliott's concept of the Veiled Performance in *Proving Woman*, 8.

[71] The study of early modern spiritual biographies are thus intimately connected to the scholarship on spiritual autobiography for which the literature in vast, particularly the Anglo-American scholarship on the early modern Spanish world. As a starting point see Howe, *Autobiographical Writing by Early Modern Hispanic Women*; Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography*. There is also a large body of scholarship on spiritual autobiography in the reformed and non-conformist traditions which is also relevant to this. See, for example, Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature*.

discerner of spirits in addition to celebrating mutually-edifying spiritual friendships.[72] Confessor-spiritual directors also had privileged access to such material and used it to subject their penitents' spiritual experience to scrutiny and verification. In turn, the lives of exemplary female penitents became entwined with the mastery of the spiritual director; "her story became his story … his relationship with the saintly woman his claim to fame." Approaches to this genre of religious life-writing have shifted in recent years as scholars have become more inclined to interpret women's spiritual writings as legitimated, rather than controlled, by the involvement of editing spiritual directors. Viewed in this way, female spiritual autobiographical writings are as much a genre for "empowerment and self-realization" as "surveillance."[73] Spiritual biographies have thus been increasingly interpreted by scholars of the early modern period as fundamentally collaborative texts, co-authored, in a sense, by both biographer and biographee.[74]

Madeleine's biography was not penned by her confessor-spiritual director, as we have established, yet her "lives" were nevertheless based on the spiritual writings he instructed her to produce as well as their correspondence.[75] In Madeleine's case however, her personal spiritual writings were reproduced in different ways by each of her biographers. In other words, as

---

[72] I use Patricia Ranft's term "confessor-spiritual director in this essay to denote the overlapping roles of the cleric hearing confession, and the one directing a spiritual life: "A Key to Counter-Reformation Women's Activism," 7–26. "Confessor-hagiographer" is Bilinkoff's phrase, see "Confessors, Penitents and the Construction of Identity;" *Related Lives*, especially chapter two; and "Confessors as Hagiographers," 419-37. Spiritual biographies were not always composed by the confessor-spiritual director, as this article reveals. It has also received treatment in Anne Jacobsen Schutte's essay on Italian spiritual biographies which shows that many lives were written by clerics unconnected to their subjects, "Ecco la santa!" 113.

[73] Donahue, "Wondrous Words," 108.

[74] Bilinkoff, "Confession, Gender, Life-Writing," 180-81; Weber, "Literature by Women Religious," 36.

[75] The spiritual autobiographical texts produced by Madeleine and countless other penitents in early modern Europe are sometimes referred to by scholars of the Hispanic context as *vida por mandato* (or command autobiographies) because they were written out of "obedience" to the confessor. On this, see Howe, *Autobiographical Writing by Early Modern Hispanic Women*.On the fact that she wrote in response to a confessor's mandate, see page below.

scholars we are presented with multiple versions of what is purportedly the same text. How should we interpret this? It is tempting to conclude that the spiritual biographies of women such as Madeleine cannot be used by historians and literary scholars to access personal female spiritual testimonies. Biographers were not always transparent about their sources or their selectiveness and it is not always apparent whether or not they were relying on memory. As James Amelang has noted in his work on oral *traza* (or "sketches") delivered during interrogations of the Spanish Inquisition, spiritual autobiographies by women could sometimes be delivered orally or even transcribed by another person making them "autobiographical speech acts" rather than textual repositories of spiritual experiences.[76] The graver methodological problem is that it is difficult to prove that such accounts originated from the subject in the first place. It is entirely possible that they were simply projections of the biographer and certainly clear that male authors in this genre exercised their creative license—or what Jodi Bilinkoff called the "prerogatives of authorship."[77]

That said, the spiritual autobiographical writings reproduced in the *vitae* of women such as Madeleine de Lamoignon should not be regarded as having been simply invented by their biographers. Many biographers in the post-Tridentine period positioned themselves as having exhumed otherwise lost edificatory writings for the spiritual benefits of their readers, and many cast themselves accordingly as "faithful copyists."[78] This was probably a product of the post-Tridentine concern with the accuracy of hagiographies after the Catholic Church tightened up the

[76] Amelang, "Tracing Lives," 33. Other comparable analyses of oral testimonies include Kathleen Swarm's work on the statements New England churches required of their candidates before they could join congregations – what she called "inscriptions of self;" Swaim, "Come and Hear," 32.

[77] Bilinkoff, "Confessors, Penitents and the Construction of Identity," 93.

[78] See, for example, the Carmelite Paul du Saint-Sacrement's life of the mystic Marguerite Pignier. He reproduces large passages of her writings, but in his prefatory statement assures the reader of his status as a faithful editor, *Idée de la véritable piété*, xvi.

procedures for the creation of new saints.[79] Biographers also used "an array of typological means" to distinguish between their words and those of their subjects; such strategies included "italics, quotation marks, brackets, large print."[80] When we reconfigure our understanding of spiritual biographers as the liberators of lost and forgotten female writings, it is less tempting to regard their reproductions of female testimony with suspicion. Rather than to treat their reproductions of female writings as "inventions" then, it seems prudent to develop a critical approach to their strategies as editors. This has important methodological consequences for how scholars might listen for female voices in spiritual biographies. Just as Dyan Elliott's image of the "veiled performance" suggests, the lives of Madeleine de Lamoignon do not permit us access to her "unmediated" voice.[81] They do, however, reveal how each of her biographers managed her seemingly prolific hand.

The first life of Madeleine composed by "Madame Teste" makes some references to Madeleine's own writings. However, the text was drafted, for the most part, as a narrative account of Madeleine's charitable projects inspired by the life of Vincent de Paul. Since the author's objective was not to reconstruct her personal spirituality extensively, most of Madeleine's spiritual autobiographical writings are rendered into the third person, and it is almost impossible to extract Madeleine's voice from them. Madeleine's Visitandine niece was responding to these omissions when she sketched the fundamental premise of her revised

[79] Smoller, *The Saint and the Chopped up Baby*, 226.
[80] Paige, "Enlightened (Il)literates," 124.
[81] Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 8.

biography: "The memoirs which madame Teste has written of the life of mademoiselle de Lamoignon so accurately mark the details of these great and perpetual acts of charity that to avoid repeating them, we will not write of them."[82] We learn that anecdotes about Madeleine's acts of charity which had "escaped" Teste's knowledge would be included, but fundamentally the life would be about Madeleine's interior spirit. Sister Anne-Élisabeth stated unequivocally that they wanted to "give an idea of her interior which we have penetrated well and which very few people have known."[83] The language of this prefatory statement confirms the collective nature of the endeavour: Madeleine's "interior" had been glimpsed by the Visitandine sisters and together *they* sought to disclose it to their readers. Who precisely this readership was is unclear from the extant manuscript. It was not unusual in this period for female religious to write lives for their own consumption or even to draft memoirs intended to supply an official biographer with material.[84] Given what we know about Anne-Élisabeth's later efforts to procure Marsollier as her aunt's biographer, the latter scenario seems most likely.

Reflecting the intellectual and spiritual premises of the biography, most of the Visitandine's account is dominated by long excerpts from what are described as Madeleine's writings "in her own hand" which the Visitandines had discovered.[85] The authenticity of Madeleine's writings seems to be a particular concern for the nun, and her copies of them are

[82] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 1.

[83] Ibid. This is revisited later in the life, see for example, fols. 143-44.

[84] There are many examples of nuns having supplied spiritual biographers with material in the spiritual biographies written about the female religious in France in this period. For example, the spiritual director Charles-Louis de Lantages based his life of a Dominican nun on the memoirs written about her by Marie-Madeleine de Mauroy, for example, but he acknowledged this genealogy of the text, which appears to have been rarer; *La Vie de la V. Mère Françoise des Séraphins*. See Paige, "Enlightened (Il)literates," 130.

[85] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 12.

interspersed with her efforts to establish the date and site of their composition.[86] We learn from her that Madeleine underwent several periods of spiritual retreat at the Visitation house. The first was in 1636 after the death of her father. The second period came after Madeleine had appointed a new confessor-spiritual director to oversee her devotional life: Jacques Aubery (d.1684), regular canon of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. This was a particularly productive episode for Madeleine and her Visitandine biographer transcribed seventeen folios purporting to be her aunt's spiritual writings. Elsewhere in the text, she quotes generously from several other kinds of writing drawn from Madeleine's papers, including a set of reflections on excerpts from the Gospels. From her niece's perspective, the inclusion of Madeleine's spiritual writings may have been an important testimony to her place as a female visionary comparable to the mystics who enjoyed strong cults in early modern convents.[87] Perhaps more critically, the citation of these passages describing Madeleine's affective and contemplative experiences also permitted the insertion of the Visitation house as a central space in the devotional life of this Lady of Charity. The "permeability" of Visitandine houses was a key aspect of their role in female devotional culture in this period.[88] By situating Madeleine's spiritual progress inside the convent, the sisters legitimated the presence of worldly women inside the cloister in the post-Tridentine age of enclosure.

[86] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," the writings during this first retreat span from fols. 12 to 23. Madeleine is described as having made 13 resolutions during her retreat which span from fols. 19 – 23.

[87] She notes, for example, at the beginning of the biography that Madeleine had an "illuminated spirit", AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 1. On the strength of these cults in early modern convents, see Copeland, "Participating in the Divine: Visions and Ecstasies," 77-78.

[88] I have borrowed the concept of "permeability" from Elizabeth Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*.

The first set of writings communicated by Sister Anne-Élisabeth was seemingly composed during a retreat Madeleine made to another religious house: the nearby Discalced Carmelite convent on the rue Saint-Jacques which had been newly founded in 1604.[89] We learn from the Visitandine that the retreat was undertaken in order for Madeleine to contemplate entering religious orders. The preamble to this account is a series of exchanges between Madeleine and her confessor, and Anne-Élisabeth noted that she was working from extant letters "in their hands."[90] From these extracts it appears that Madeleine's uncertainty about her vocation stemmed largely from her recognition that religious vows would be the most "joyous" state, but she sensed something telling her that God, "her love," did not want that for her.[91]

While all of Madeleine's biographers presented this period in her life as a process of negotiation with her parents (particularly her father) and her confessor, in the Visitandine version of events Madeleine's own interior struggle is prioritized. That is, her communications with her confessor are embedded in the narrative, and her father is presented as having impeded the clarity Madeleine sought from God.[92] Instead, Madeleine's personal reflections are presented fully by her niece over six folios.[93] The nun estimated that these writings were composed in 1631 shortly before Madeleine made her final resolutions on June 11, the feast of Saint Barnabus.[94] Some of Madeleine's spiritual experiences during the retreat were intensely affective: "The first day of my retreat I was occupied in prayer on the passion of Our Lord because it is a subject capable of touching

[89] The Carmelite convent on the rue Saint-Jacques was regularly used by the pious female elite as a space for religious retreat in early modern Paris despite the Tridentine decrees of religious enclosure; see Diefendorf, "Contradictions of the Century of Saints," 480-81.

[90] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fols. 9-11.

[91] Ibid., fols. 9-10.

[92] Ibid., fol. 9.

[93] Ibid., fols. 12-18.

[94] Ibid., fol. 18.

my heart and arresting the liveliness of my spirit … the following day in my morning prayer I had strong intimate and penetrating sentiments of affection for Our Lord."[95] The nun did not appear to have hesitated about reporting Madeleine's heart having been "touched" by Christ and his love feeling intimate and penetrating. That is not to say that Madeleine's spiritual writings were not subject to her some degree of scrutiny by her niece. On some occasions, she made annotations and commented in particular on qualities of Madeleine's interior spirit and even errors in her judgement.[96] Yet her readiness to reproduce personal spiritual writings in which Madeleine imitated the emotional and almost erotic mystical language of divine union is significant.[97] The nun thus used Madeleine's own testimony to tell the story of Madeleine's inner torment in the months before she made her resolutions.

In both the presentation manuscript and the two further copies of the Jesuit biography, Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans condensed this productive period of retreat. His version of Madeleine's protracted spiritual toil was rendered into one passage describing how her attempts to ask God about her choice of path were accomplished during "several retreats," where "in solitude, God spoke to her heart through the inner voice of the holy spirit."[98] Importantly, the Jesuit acknowledges this period as transformative, but in his retelling the role of the confessor is foregrounded. We learn that Madeleine wrote to her confessor, the *curé* of the Parisian parish of Saint-Josse, and asked him to examine her conscience via return letter. The Jesuit biographer quotes lengthy passages, apparently

[95] Ibid., fol. 12.

[96] Ibid.; at fol. 16 there are marginal notations put inside brackets which points out the "délicatesse" of Madeleine's conscience and even points to weaknesses in her thoughts.

[97] Ibid. On the fourth day of her retreat, Madeleine decides to submit to the will of God and to deny her own wishes to take religious vows, fols. 15-16.

[98] BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fol. 19.

verbatim, from this correspondence.[99] The essence of the exchange was that Madeleine wrote to ask her confessor to discern her spirits and help her to interpret God's will with regards to her vocation. The confessor's response, we learn from the Jesuit, confirmed Madeleine's feelings about the divine origins of the "inspiration" she had felt to "live celibately."[100] It is revealing here that the writings Madeleine composed in a letter to a confessor (and thus under his radar) were almost fully incorporated by the Jesuit biographer, whereas those she wrote freely in the Carmelite convent were compressed. Madeleine's own story about the interior workings of her spirit was thus far less central in this Jesuit reconfiguration.

As Madeleine's fourth biographer, Jacques Marsollier seems to have taken another tack. He commenced his reiteration of this period of Madeleine's life by acknowledging her "irresolution" prompted by the doubts she felt over her calling to the religious life.[101] Like the Jesuit biographer, Marsollier abridged Madeleine's spiritual writings, but he did allude to the stirring conversations with God recounted more fully by Sister Anne-Élisabeth: "she addressed herself to God himself and prayed him to make His will known to her. Do not abandon me, she said to him, in these uncertainties, disperse the darkness which stops me from knowing what you ask of me, it is you alone that I search for."[102] Marsollier appears to have been more willing than the Jesuit to provide his reader with a window onto Madeleine's soul. This may be indicative of his remit from the family. As noted above, the Lamoignon wanted the spiritual biography of their aunt to reveal her "interior" as well as the charitable works for which she was more well-known. Perhaps Marsollier's attempts to do this betray their motivations for procuring a fourth

[99] Ibid., fol. 21.
[100] Ibid., fol. 23.
101 Ibid., fols., 31-32.
102 Ibid., fol. 32.

biography? The cleric nonetheless tempered his account by supplementing it with a protracted narrative detailing Madeleine's interactions with her confessor following the retreat and a lengthier version of her communications with her father.[103]

There are three retellings of the story here in which Madeleine's own voice is variously emphasized, muted, and censored by her biographers. The Jesuit Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans was perhaps most keen to accentuate Madeleine's subjection to her confessor's authority and only really wanted his reader to observe her epistolary communications with him. Marsollier, arguably writing to satiate the Lamoignon family desires for a portrait of their aunt's interior, allowed his reader to glimpse Madeleine's own spiritual labors, albeit in a lengthy process of navigating the concerns of her father and her male confessor. The Visitandine, Anne-Élisabeth, filled her memoirs of Madeleine's life with her spiritual autobiographical writings and was even prepared to quote those which revealed her aunt's faults.

The nun's emphasis on her aunt's interiority was consistent with Visitandine spirituality in its later seventeenth-century form and may help to explain why she chose to foreground it. While their founders initially envisaged the spiritual life of a Visitandine as one of simplicity rather than "intellectual achievement," it gradually gave way to a more mystical pursuit of a "higher state."[104] As Jacques Le Brun and Elizabeth Rapley have both argued, later seventeenth-century Visitandine biographies and death notices were mystical in tone, including the "passive" prayer techniques which came to be associated with

[103] Ibid., fols. 35-45.
[104] Rapley, "'Un tresor enfoui, une lampe sous un boisseau,'"156-57.

Madame Guyon (1648-1717).[105] Essentially, this method of prayer required an abandonment of the senses to allow the soul to turn to God. In addition to these mystical themes, Le Brun found that the biographies which Visitandines composed about the lives of their fellow sisters were shaped by protestations about the fear of death, anxieties over the judgement of God, and spiritual "aridity" ("sécheresses.")[106] When considered within this broader context of Visitandine spirituality, Sister Anne-Élisabeth's motivations for securing a biography which was more attuned to her aunt's interior struggle become clear.

The editorial choices made by Madeleine's biographers almost certainly reflected their purposes and target audience. As a female nun, Anne-Élisabeth possibly expected that her male clerical collaborators would edit, enhance, or censor her lengthy reproductions of Madeleine's spiritual autobiography. If she was writing simply to supply Marsollier (and previously the Jesuit) with details of her aunt's testimonies, she could be less cautious about the material she copied. Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans and Jacques Marsollier, on the other hand, were writing with a more public reception of the text in mind—at the very least manuscript circulation but probably publication in print. These considerations remind us that distinctions have to be made between the spiritual biographies produced for the printing press and those compiled for smaller-scale transmission.[107]

Perhaps more significantly, the strategies each author adopted uncover how biographers functioned as editors. In other words, they can tell us more about which aspects of female spiritual writings may have been "alternately amplified and muffled" by

[105] Le Brun, *Soeur et amante*, 227-29 ; Rapley, "'Un tresor enfoui, une lampe sous un boisseau," 164.

[106] Le Brun, *Soeur et amante,* 228-29.

[107] This is something Jacques Le Brun has noted in his work on the biographies of female religious: "À corps perdu," 390.

different categories of biographer, whether lay or religious, male or female.[108] This is further exemplified by the selections Madeleine's biographers continued to make about the kinds of writings they reproduced. Both Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans and Jacques Marsollier incorporated Madeleine's writings in their discussions of her interiority but in a more discriminating way. Interestingly, neither of the male biographers were as careful as the nun in pinpointing the dates of Madeleine's writings – probably because, unlike the Visitandine, they did not have a strong dedication to the convent which inspired the works. They were also less cautious about distinguishing Madeleine's words from their gloss – perhaps an attempt to lend her writings credibility. Both also prefaced their copies of Madeleine's spiritual writings in a similar way. The Jesuit noted that "there remain some fragments of her writings" from her retreats which allowed him to see the "interior principles" underpinning her charity and added "here are the most remarkable ones."[109] Marsollier borrowed heavily from the Jesuit in his almost identical introductory passage, adding a note on their edificatory potential and his motivations for reproducing those that he believed "will be most useful to the reader."[110]Although it is clear that the ensuing text in both male-authored biographies is based substantially on the same set of writings, Marsollier's reproduction of Madeleine's reflections is fuller, continuing for six folios.[111]

A comparative look at the copies Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans and Jacques Marsollier made of the "most remarkable" sections of Madeleine's writings, cross-referenced against the versions reproduced in Sister Anne-Élisabeth's life, brings the editing preferences of the biographers into sharper focus. During Madeleine's second retreat at the Visitation house, for example, amidst

[108] Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 8.
[109] BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fol. 31.
[110] BSG, Ms. 4232, fol. 69.
[111] Ibid., fols. 69-75; BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fols. 31-33.

the first day of her solitude, one of her spiritual exercises was to reflect upon her own dedication to God.[112] Three of Madeleine's biographers reproduced a slightly different version of the writings Madeleine set to paper that day, in which it is possible to see the processes of condensing (and perhaps censoring?) at work.

Figure 1 Biographer Versions of Madeleine de Lamoignon's Autobiographical Writings

Visitandine Biography	Jesuit Biography	Marsollier Biography
"Jay esté fort touchée davoir employé mon esprit et mener p[ou]r offencer un Dieu qui ma fait tant de bien n'estant au monde que p[ou]r l'aymer et le servir. J'ay senti une grande confiance de m'a procher de luy de me jetter a ces pieds et de calmer ma crainte par la confiance et par l'amour puisque n[ot]re seigneur a dit quil n'estoit pas venu p[ou]r les justes, mais p[ou]r les pescheurs."[113]	"Dieu ne m'a faite que pour le servir et je l'ay tant de fois offencée cette pensée me remplit de crainte mais quand je lis que JC nest pas tant venu pour les justes que pour les pecheurs je me sens pleine de confiance."[114]	"Il est donc vrai ajoute t'elle que Dieu m'a faite et qu'il n'a pu me faire que pour lui-meme pour le connoitre, l'aimer et le servir l'ai-je fait ? helas combien au contraire ai-je manque a des devoirs si justes et si indispensables ? Cette pensée me remplit de crainte mais quand je lis que Jesus Christ n'est pas tant venu pour les justes que pour les pescheurs ma fraieur se dissipe et je me sens pleine d'amour et de confiance."[115]

Each biographer shaped the nature of the spiritual experience Madeleine purportedly described. In all three versions of her testimony, Madeleine's reflections were dominated by fears that she had transgressed or offended God through her past conduct, but her responses to these anxieties were markedly different in each case. In her niece's account, Madeleine felt ("senti") drawn to God and threw herself at Christ's feet ("jetter a ces

[112] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 51. I have quoted the original French in each case to demonstrate the similarity of the passages.

[113] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa nièce," fol. 51.

[114] BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fol. 31.

[115] BSG, Ms. 4232, fols. 69-71.

pieds"). She found comfort ("calmer ma crainte") in faith and love by reminding herself of his promise to save the sinners as well as the righteous. In the Jesuit account, doubts over her many transgressions were eased when she *read* ("quand je lis") that Christ would save the sinners. Marsollier's adaptation contains more literary embellishments and rhetorical devices, such as projections about Madeleine's own internal dialogue, which are more broadly consistent with his style as biographer. Yet here, too, it was when Madeleine *read* about Christ's promise that her fears dissipated and she felt filled with faith and love. The assurance that Christ came to call the sinners, not the righteous, to repentance is a biblical reference to Jesus's calling of the tax collector, Levi, in the New Testament. Essentially, for Madeleine's two male biographers, then, this was a spiritual experience grounded in the reading of scripture. Conversely, for Sister Anne-Élisabeth, Madeleine's experience was not guided by reading, but by emotion. It was then intensified by physical gestures (whether real or imagined prostration at Christ's feet) and further reflection. This was an affective spiritual experience which the Jesuit and Marsollier later toned down in less expressive and more sober reworkings.

The Jesuit biographer's strategy here requires further elucidation since it appears at odds with the affective prayer that characterised Jesuit spiritual direction in this period. The Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola's (1491-1556) widely-read devotional text, the *Spiritual Exercises*, offered a programme of prayer which was later appropriated by lay and religious readers and was premised upon meditation upon emotional scenes in the life of Christ. In theory, Jesuits were not supposed to direct the souls of nuns, and neither were women supposed to progress past the initial stages of Loyola's *Exercises.*[116] Despite this,

[116] Macek, "'Ghostly Fathers' and their 'Virtuous Daughters'," 231.

Ignatian prayer was widely practiced in female religious houses by the seventeenth century.[117] In Vannes in Brittany, a Jesuit retreat house was even established specifically for women undertaking the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, even though the order in Rome opposed it.[118] The Jesuit biographer's restraint was not, then, reflective of any broader Jesuit attitude towards women and affective spirituality. It likely was a reflection of the ultimate goal of the writing of Madeleine's biography: that the Church formally recognize her virtues and exemplary piety. That was unlikely to happen if she appeared as an unregulated lay female mystic, something against which France had already seen a reaction in the anti-mystical movements of the pre-Quietist and Quietist controversies during the mid-to-later seventeenth century.[119] Likewise, Marsollier's approach can also be interpreted as an expression of a similar cautiousness. It is worth noting here that some male spiritual biographers of the period were even less willing to reproduce female writings than either the Jesuit or Marsollier were.[120] Neither Marsollier nor the Jesuit were quite so conservative in their approach, but they appear to have been strategic in what they did reproduce. Both biographers completely omitted Madeleine's reflections on Gospel excerpts and her list of resolutions, for example.

It is not possible to know whether the two male biographers were being supplied with Madeleine's own writings or whether they relied on the nun's transcriptions. There is, of course, no reason to assume that Sister Anne-Élisabeth's version was the most faithful to

---

[117] Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 135.

[118] Mostaccio, "Shaping the Spiritual Exercises," 659-84.

[119] France witnessed its first anti-mystical reaction in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. This has been studied by Sophie Houdard in, *Les invasions mystiques*. The Quietist controversy surrounding the mysticism of Madame Guyon, see Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit* and Bruneau, *Women Mystics Confront the Modern World*.

[120] Paige, "Enlightened (Il)literates," 126.

the original; Madeleine's own writings do not survive, and we therefore have little sense of whether, and how far, her niece had already adapted them. We can be sure, however, that for the Visitandine, her aunt's writings were not produced in any dangerously independent sphere, but inside the confines of the cloister and seemingly at the behest of her new confessor, Aubery. During Madeleine's retreat in the convent, she had experienced some of the spiritual toils in prayer that Visitandines were writing about elsewhere in their biographies. Sister Anne-Élisabeth had set out in detail these affective experiences and the remarkable spiritual progress of her aunt during the retreat, which appeared in the male biographies in an abridged format.

Of broader significance here is the indication that there may have been subtle variations in the stories that different categories of spiritual biographer chose to tell about their subjects.[121] The nature of the surviving sources do not always afford us this detail; many convent draft lives, in particular, were discarded after more official versions were published and thus became lost and "forgotten" female texts.[122] Only by reconstructing the processes of writing lives can we start to see these editorial strategies at work. The role played by male clerical biographers in condensing female spiritual autobiographical writings may have been considerable, while, as Nicolas Paige has observed, "some of the sharpest formulations of the need for a new interior sort of writing were, in fact, the work of women."[123]

Spiritual Biography as Hagiography: Madeleine de Lamoignon's Exemplary Death

---

[121] This is in contrast to some existing studies which have downplayed those differences. See for example, Diefendorf, "Discerning Spirits," 246.

[122] Elizabeth Patton's research on the missing biography of John Cornelius written by Dorothy Arundell is an interesting example of recovering "lost" texts; "Dorothy Arundell's *Acts of Father John Cornelius*," 51-62.

[123] Paige, "Enlightened (Il)literates," 129.

The Counter-Reformation ushered in a new era in saint-making. In 1588, the Catholic Church ended a sixty-three-year hiatus in canonisation and in the following forty-one years, canonized some thirteen saints, including the mystic Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582). In 1588 the Church also launched its Sacred Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies which was to oversee the examination of candidates for canonization. Spiritual biographies, or hagiographies, were often part of canonisation causes and were used as proof of miracles that the candidate had performed, as we have already noted.[124] The post-Tridentine Church's new regulatory attitude towards the canonization process had resulted in a decree of March 13, 1625 which explicitly proscribed unapproved cults surrounding holy men and women. This was later modified on October 2, 1625 to allow for the *private* veneration of recently deceased pious persons, but public cults remained prohibited.[125] Spiritual biographers also had to navigate a very rigid set of prescriptions on "saint making" which meant they could not make unsubstantiated claims about "miracles" or "revelations." Biographers were required to make explicit their status as writers of "human history," rather than testifiers to saintliness.[126] In reality, however, spiritual biographers did relate stories of miraculous healings, even surrounding lay women.[127] As Antoinette Gimaret has expertly shown, the body was a key site for the construction of saintliness in spiritual biographies and provided indisputable proof that the body was "canonisable."[128]

---

[124] Suire, *La Saintété Française*.

[125] Copeland, *Maria Maddelena De' Pazzi*, 137.

[126] Schutte, "Ecco la santa !" 114.

[127] There are particularly interesting examples of this in the spiritual biographies produced surrounding the Sulpician spiritual director Charles-Louis de Lantages and his lay and religious female directees in Le-Puy-en-Vélay. See, for example, his life of the Dominican Agnes de Langeac: *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Agnez de Jésus.* This received some treatment in Lierheimer, "False Sanctity and Spiritual Imposture."

[128] Gimaret, "Savoir lire le corps de l'autre."

None of Madeleine's four biographers made specific claims about miraculous healings surrounding Madeleine's body or her tomb, but they did all construct different accounts of her holy death using hagiographic tropes to present her as a holy daughter ("sainte fille") worthy of veneration. The "life" which was written by Madame Teste gives an account of Madeleine's death on the morning of April 24, 1687. It describes her dying in an armchair after which she was placed in her bed for close to three days.[129] During this period, her face remained "beautiful" and "rosy," her body produced no odour, and there was something unusually "venerable" about her face. The biographer exercised some semantic caution about making any explicit claims to "sanctity," but she did infer the existence of an emerging cult: "Many persons of piety and of merit among her friends came to pray to God for her, but some reciting the *Laudate* and others the *Te Deum*, not being able to believe that someone filled with the love of God and charity for the poor as she had been could remain without receiving reward for her great works."[130] In this rendering of her death, Madeleine's contemporaries praised her with the recitation of psalms (*Laudate*) and the chanting of the *Te Deum*. Both were traditionally used in liturgical ceremonies as songs of praise or thanksgiving; here they seem to have served as evidence of Madeleine's saintly reputation among her contemporaries. This may have also reflected the biographer's attempts to establish an early cult surrounding the unofficial saint.[131] It is worthy of note here that Teste, a fellow laywoman, appears to have emphasized Madeleine's empathy and charity towards the poor as deserving of "reward." Here, Madeleine's passing was lamented because of her "great works," rather than any claims to visionary status.

---

[129] AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon, anonyme," fol. 91: "Elle demeura dans son fauteuil un quart d'heure apres qu'elle eut expiré ensuite de quoy en la mit dans son lit ou elle a été pres de trois jours."

[130] Ibid.

[131] The veneration of unofficial saints continued to happen; see Burke, "How to be a Counter Reformation Saint," 51.

Sister Anne-Élisabeth's account of her aunt's death added more color. Here, too, Madeleine's passing occurred at 11:30 am on the morning of April 24, 1687 with "Madame Teste" present at her death bed.[132] This time, her death was accompanied by a musical witness to her saintliness as a "concert of trumpets could be heard beneath the windows of her chamber." For the nun, this was proof of the "joy felt by the angels in receiving her soul." The Visitandine's gloss also appended the detail that as Madeleine lay on her bed in that state for two days, people came to look upon her "like a saint" and collected items and belongings that had been in contact with her.[133] Sister Anne-Élisabeth's version of Madeleine's death and early cult reflected some of her broader objectives as biographer. The centrality of the Visitation convent in rendering of Madeleine's death was reinforced by the conclusion to the text which reported that her heart was sent to reside with the Visitandine sisters after her death. Sister Anne-Élisabeth noted the ceremony that accompanied the arrival of the "precious treasure" into the convent church.[134]

The Jesuit, Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans, sought to make Madeleine's death even more unambiguously saintly. His version narrated her death "in the odor of sanctity" but also expounded it with an account of the miraculous preservation of Madeleine's face. [135] For two days in her bed, he wrote that her face remained "without change." He also made her corpse comparable to the "body of saints" which people "hastened to see" and requested some of Madeleine's personal effects "to keep as relics."[136] Incorruptible corpses were, of course, a common feature of saints' lives and were usually accepted as miraculous proof of sanctity.

---

[132] Madame Teste is mentioned as present at fol. 173 of AN, 399/AP/5, "Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon, par sa nièce."

[133] Ibid., fol. 173.

[134] Ibid., fol. 174.

[135] The bodies of saints were known to emit a pleasant fragrance known as the "odour of sanctity." The phrase also had a more general, figurative meaning as a general "air" of sanctity: Graziano, *Wounds of Love*, 80.

[136] BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fols. 160-61.

Transformed features on the saintly corpse were thought to signify the soul's presence with God in heaven.[137] White faces or those which seemed to radiate light were also part of this hagiographic code.

In the final biography, Jacques Marsollier was mostly faithful to the Jesuit's account of Madeleine's death. His version of the miraculous preservation of her face is identical to the Jesuit's. In his final passage, like the Jesuit, Marsollier emphasised the virtues that this "holy soul" (a phrase used by both biographers) had practiced to such a "high degree of perfection," but he added the detail that Madeleine's life had been one dedicated to the "most heroic charity."[138] He prefaced his description of Madeleine's passing, however, with a longer preamble which served to convey Madeleine's intense fear of death. This was perhaps intended to balance accounts of her sanctity with an impression of her humility. It may have also signalled her courageous response to her imminent death. He recounted in full her dying conversations with her confessor Dubois, for example, in which Madeleine expressed her fear about facing God's "justice," but also her confidence in his mercy.[139] Interestingly, the Jesuit author condensed Madeleine's own words in his rendering of her deathbed encounter with Dubois.[140] This may, again, indicate Marsollier's desire to give a fuller portrayal of her interior than his Jesuit predecessor had permitted. For Marsollier, the reader was to learn from the way Madeleine

[137] Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 377.

[138] BSG, Ms. 4232, fol. 472: "charité le plus heroique; " c/f BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fol. 161.

[139] BSG, Ms. 4232, fols. 465-6; in Marsollier's version there is a longer passage of Madeleine's own final sentiments as she neared death. In this version, Madeleine said to Dubois: "Je sens bien que la dissolution de mon corps approcha, et que je suis prete a comparoistre devant Dieu le tems va finir pour moi. Je touche a mes derniers momens, l'éternité approche cette eternité a laquelle on pense si peu et qui devroit nous occuper tout entiers j'avoue que mes peches et la justice de Dieu m'effraient helas qui me trembleroit pas devant un Dieu si saint qu'il ne trouveroit pas les anges purs s'il les examinoit a la rigeur cepandant sa misericorde et les merites de Jesus Christ me rassirent il est vrai quil doit etre mon juge mais il est mon sauveur…"

[140] Marsollier's transcription can be compared with BnF, Ms. Fr, 14342, fols. 156-7, in which Madeleine's own words are compressed.

conducted herself in her final moments; she received the sacraments with the "faith" "love" and "respect" that you would expect of one who had lead such a "holy life."[141]

In all of Madeleine's biographies, she died in the odor of sanctity. Her biographers built up the scene of her holy death in layers gleaned from the "lives" already at their disposal. In the first biography, Teste inferred the existence of a cult surrounding Madeleine immediately following her death because of her love for the poor. The Jesuit later sidelined Sister Anne-Élisabeth's more poetic account of the trumpet chorus, but both he and Marsollier emphasised the details of what they clearly perceived as indisputable evidence of her saintly status: the unchanged face. In the final biography, although Marsollier did not embellish Orléans' account of her incorruptible corpse, he was more attentive to the workings of Madeleine's interior in her final moments, just as he had been elsewhere in the text, possibly at the request of his Visitandine supplicants.

In the textual construction of Madeleine's saintliness, it was her "official" male biographers who were more explicit than her female counterparts. At one level, this can be explained by the fact that both the Jesuit and Marsollier were authors with reputations for writing and publishing *vitae*, something which may have given them greater confidence in writing about Madeleine's exemplary death. Their apparent ambitiousness as "aspiring saint makers"[142] may also have been an expression of their desire to "manage" her lay status in their constructions of her sanctity. This is not to say that the charitable work of lay woman could not be a route to sanctity in itself; the case of the married Italian laywoman Catherine of Genoa canonised in 1737 is an example of a successful and well-known later cause on that basis. However, Madeleine was unmarried and neither did she belong to a Third Order as did many of the women who were

[141] BSG, Ms. 4232, folio 464.
[142] Strasser, "Clara Hortulana of Embach," 42.

canonized in this period. As an "uncloistered bride of Christ," she was a "dangerous alternative" to what the Church intended for women.[143] This was arguably more consequential to her "professional" male biographers who may have fine-tuned the details of Madeleine's death to correspond with the saintly deaths of women who made more conventional life choices.

In their passages on Madeleine's holy death, in particular, both male biographers appeared to have leaned more heavily on an established hagiographic repertoire of saintly qualities and signs. As historian Peter Burke put it in his seminal essay on Counter-Reformation saints, there were a "relatively small number of saintly roles, or routes to holiness" and any potential new candidates had to be "matched with old roles."[144] There were few seventeenth-century female exemplars on which Madeleine's biographers could base their accounts, since there were only five females canonised by the Catholic Church in their lifetimes. Aspects of their accounts were thus reminiscent of a longer tradition which included the deaths of women such as the Italian nun Catherine of Bologna (d.1463), whose face was said to turn fresh and beautiful after her death. There are also, however, particularly strong parallels with the deaths of new female saints such as Teresa of Ávila whose deathbed face looked "brighter, younger and suddenly more beautiful" when she was presented with the Eucharist. After Teresa's death, the wrinkles in her skin were said to have disappeared and her face was described as radiant, for example.[145] For Madeleine's male biographers, then, in order for her potential as a Counter-Reformation saint to be demonstrated, she had to die like a Counter-Reformation nun.

Of all her biographers, it was Marsollier who most unambiguously set out to present Madeleine's life as worthy of veneration. Even in the opening paragraphs of the first book of

[143] Mazzonis, "A Female Idea of Religious Perfection," 398.
[144] Burke, "How to be a Counter-Reformation Saint," 55-56.
[145] Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 407.

Madeleine's life, he explicitly made her story comparable to that of the "life of a saint" of "great edification for the Church."[146] Yet however edifying Madeleine's "many lives" were to their readers, this was ultimately a story of failed saint-making, as the Church never formally recognized the Lady of Charity as a holy woman. Related to Madeleine's status as a "failed saint" is the fact that all of her biographies remained unpublished. Of course, there is no straightforward connection between the publication of a biography and a successful canonisation cause. For instance, biographies of the foundress Jeanne de Chantal began to be published a year after her death, yet she was not canonized until the mid-eighteenth century. There is also a large body of published biographies of lay female mystics and charitable benefactors, in many cases authored by experienced and reputable biographers, which have not produced any new saints. It seems clear, however, that Madeleine's female family members were seeking a published biography in the hope that their aunt would receive the public and formal recognition which they felt she deserved. In this case, as with many other manuscript biographies of seventeenth-century lay women, the reasons why publication never came are unclear. In writing her lives, nevertheless, Madeleine's spiritual biographers had commemorated her interior and exterior devotional life. The existence of multiple copies of some of these manuscripts suggests that, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the texts were being read and circulated among pious readers who wanted to memorialize the extraordinary life of this Counter-Reformation *dévote*.[147]

[146] BSG, Ms. 4232, folio 3.

[147] Nicholas Schapira has explored manuscript circulation and readership in the life of Michel de Marillac, where he finds evidence for a "communauté de lecteurs;" see "Les lecteurs de La Vie de Michel de Marillac."

This article has contended that the collaborative nature of early modern *vitae* can be better understood by considering the processes of drafting and editing that underpinned the writing of Madeleine de Lamoignon's spiritual biography. Women were instrumental in this process, even if it was in their capacity as "ghost writers." In the case of Madeleine de Lamoignon's spiritual biography, Sister Anne-Élisabeth, possibly in collaboration with some of her Visitandine sisters, wrote substantial portions of the life of a woman outside of the convent wall—potentially in response to a biography written by another lay woman. The authorial voices of these women were hushed in the presentation copy of Madeleine's life by the Jesuit historian Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans and in its retelling by Jacques Marsollier. The writing of Madeleine's life was also clearly connected to a much broader culture of lay spiritual biography in seventeenth-century France which appears to have inspired the project, and which is yet to be critically examined by scholars. As historians turn their attention to lives produced over the convent wall, as well as those inside it, it will hopefully become clearer if and how lay female spiritual biographies mirrored the contours of the long Counter-Reformation in France.

What is clear from this single case study alone is that different kinds of biographer managed the status of prospective lay female saints in a number of ways. In particular, Madeleine's male biographers seem to have downplayed the idiosyncrasies of her spiritual experiences and used hagiographic prototypes in their accounts of her holy death. This may have functioned to smooth over Madeleine's status as an uncloistered and unmarried woman and strengthened the case for her saintliness. Sister Anne-Élisabeth, as a Visitandine nun, was more inclined to prioritize what appeared to be Madeleine's words over her own authorial gloss, a technique which also allowed her to give precedence to the Visitandine house as a space for interiority. As a fellow laywoman and Lady of Charity, Madame Teste was perhaps the most

satisfied with a biography which simply centred upon Madeleine's role as a servant of the poor. The biographers' respective treatments of Madeleine's own spiritual autobiographical writings thus serve as an important cautionary tale against using biographies to access women's personal spiritual writings, without a critical awareness of the "veiled performance" we are witnessing.

The excavation of the writing process behind Madeleine's biographies thus also reveals a "life" in translation. Each biographer produced a narrative which borrowed from existing texts and made modifications and additions which reflected their objectives as authors. Even the presentation copy of Madeleine's biography written by the renowned Jesuit historian Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans was not the definitive version as envisaged by the Lamoignon, who were still commissioning the production of different redactions as late as 1703. Madeleine de Lamoignon's "life" was still very much evolving, it seems, sixteen years after her death.

References

Abelly, Louis. 1664. *La Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, 3 vols., Paris.

Amelang, James. 2011. "Tracing Lives: The Spanish Inquisition and the Act of Autobiography." In *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Arianne Baggerman, Rudolph Dekker, and Michael Mascuch. Leiden.

Bauduen, Marc de. 1666. *La Vie admirable de... Charlotte-Marguerite de Gondy, Mise de Magnelais.* Paris, 1666).

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 1993. "Confessors, Penitents and the Construction of Identities in Early Modern Avila." In *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe 1500 – 1800*: *Essays in Honour of Natalie Zemon Davis*, edited by Barbara Diefendorf and Carla Hesse. Ann Arbor.

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 1999. "The 'Many' Lives of Pedro de Ribadeneyra." *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 1: 180-96.

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 2000. "Confession, Gender, Life-Writing: Some Cases (Mainly from Spain)." In *Penitence in the Age of Reformations*, edited by Katharine. J, Lualdi and Anne. T. Thayer. Aldershot.

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 2005. *Related Lives: Confessors and their Female Penitents 1450 – 1750*. Ithaca.

Bilinkoff, Jodi. 2008. "Confessors as Hagiographers in Early Modern Catholic Culture." In *A New History of Penance*, edited by A. Firey. 419-37. Leiden.

Bowden, Caroline and James Kelly. 2013. *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*. Aldershot.

Bowden, Caroline. 2010. "Collecting the Lives of Early Modern Women Religious: Obituary Writing and the Development of Collective Memory and Corporate Identity." *Women's History Review* 19, no. 1: 7–209.

Brejon de Lavergnée, Matthieu. 2011. *Histoire des Filles de la Charité: XVIIe – XVIIIe siècle: la rue pour cloître.* Paris.

Brejon de Lavergnée, Matthieu. 2016. *Filles* are *Des Filles de la Charité aux sœurs de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul: quatre siècles de «cornettes» (XVIIe-XXe s.)*. Paris.

Bruneau, Marie Florine. 1998. *Women Mystics Confront the Modern World*: *Marie de L'Incarnation and Madame Guyon.* New York.

Burkardt, Albrecht. _____. "Filles de la Charité et attitudes face au miracle à travers les témoignages de béatification du procès de béatification de Vincent de Paul." In *Des filles de la charité aux sœurs de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul,* 335-360.

Burke, Peter. 2005. "How to be a Counter Reformation Saint," in *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*: *Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge, 2005), 51.

Carr, Thomas M., Jr. _____. *Studies in Early Modern France: The Cloister and the World*.

Coolahan, Marie-Louise. 2007. "Identity Politics and Nuns' Writings," *Women's Writing* 14, no. 2: 306-20.

Coolahan, Marie-Louise. 2010. *Women, Writing and Language in Early Modern Ireland.* Oxford.

Coolahan, Marie-Louise. 2012. "Transnational Reception and Early Modern Women's Lost Texts." *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7: 261-70.

Coolahan, Marie-Louise. 2013. "Reception, Reputation and Early Modern Women's Missing Texts." *Critical Quarterly* 55, no. 4: 3-14.

Copeland, Clare. 2013. "Participating in the Divine: Visions and Ecstasies in a Florentine Convent." In *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen. Leiden.

Copeland, Clare. 2016. *Maria Maddelena De' Pazzi: The Making of a Counter-Reformation Saint.* Oxford.

Coste, Pierre C. M. 1988. *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, Volume II (Jan. 1640-July 1646)* 71, no. 4.

d'Orléans, Pierre-Joseph. 1672. *La Vie du B. Stanislas Kostka, novice de la Compagnie de Jésus.* Paris.

d'Orléans, Pierre-Joseph. 1681. *La Vie du P. Charles Spinola.* Paris.

d'Orléans, Pierre-Joseph. 1688. *La Vie du Père Pierre Coton.* Paris.

Diefendorf, Barbara. 2001. "Contradictions of the Century of Saints: Aristocratic Patronage and the Convents of Counter-Reformation Paris." *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 3.

Diefendorf, Barbara. 2003. "Discerning Spirits: Women and Spiritual Authority in Counter-Reformation France." In *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, edited by M. Mikesell and A. Seeff. Newark.

Diefendorf, Barbara. 2004. *From Penitence to Charity.* Oxford.

Dinan, Susan. 2006. *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France: The Early History of the Daughters of Charity.* Aldershot.

Dompnier, Bernard, ed. 2001. *Visitation et visitandines au XVII et XVIII siècles; actes du colloque d'Annecy*. Saint Étienne.

Donahue, Darcy R. 2011. "Wondrous Words: Miraculous Literacy and Real Literacy in the Convents of Early Modern Spain." In *Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World*, edited by Anne J. Cruz and Rosilie Hernandez. London.

Eire, Carlos. 1995. *From Madrid to Purgatory*: *The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain.* Cambridge.

Elliott, Dyan. 2004. *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages.* Princeton.

Faydeau, Victor. 1659. *La Lumière cachée sous le muid mise au jour, la lampe mesprisée dans la pensée des riches préparée pour le temps ordonné et pour le jour de feste, ou l'Esprit de défunte D. M. Lumagne, fondatrice de la maison et hospital de la Providence des Filles de Dieu, veuve de feu messire François Polaillon.* Paris: 1659)

Ferguson, Margaret and Barry Weller. 1994. *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry with the Lady Falkland: her life, by one of her daughters.* California.

Gimaret, Antoinette. 2015. "Savoir lire le corps de l'autre: la biographie hagiographique et le travail de la preuve (autour des *Vies* de Marthe d'Oraison et Agnès d'Aquillenqui)." *Les Dossiers du Grihl*: 1. http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/6355 ; DOI: 10.4000/dossiersgrihl.6355 [date accessed Sept. 21 2016].

Goodrich, Jaime. 2013. *Faithful Translators: Authorship, Gender and Religion in Early Modern England.* Chicago.

Goodrich, Jaime. 2014. "Nuns and Community-Centred Writing: The Benedictine Rule and Brussels Statutes." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 3: 287-303.

Graziano, Frank. 2004. *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima* (Oxford, 2004), 80.

Gude, Mary L. 1999. "Madame de Miramion and the Friends of Vincent de Paul." *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 20, no. 2: 238-51.

Hallett, Nicky. 2007. *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period*. London.

Houdard, Sophie. 2008. *Les invasions mystiques: spiritualités, hétérodoxies, et censure au début de l'époque moderne.* Paris.

Howe, Elizabeth Teresa. 2015. *Autobiographical Writing by Early Modern Hispanic Women.* Aldershot.

Hsia, R. Po-Chia. 2005. *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*. 2nd ed., Cambridge.

Ibsen, Kristine. 1999. *Women's Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America.* Gainesville.

Lantages, Charles-Louis de. 1666. *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Agnez de Jésus, religieuse de l'ordre de Saint-Dominique au dévot monastère de Sainte-Catherine de Langeac ; par un prêtre du clergé (Ch.-L. de Lantages) ; avec l'abrégé de la Vie de la Mère Françoise des Séraphins, prieure du monastère de Saint-Thomas d'Aquin à Paris.* Paris.

Lantages, Charles-Louis de. 1669. *La Vie de la V. Mère Françoise des Séraphins, religieuse de l'ordre de S. Dominique au monastère de S. Thomas d'Aquin, à Paris, par un ecclésiastique.* Clermont.

Lay, Jenna. 2016. *Beyond the Cloister: Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture.* Philadelphia.

Le Bourgeois, Marie-Amelie. 2003. *Ursulines d'Anne de Xainctonge: 1606: contribution à l'histoire des communautés religieuses féminines sans clôture.* Saint-Étienne, 2003.

Le Brun, Jacques. 1982. "Conversion et continuité intérieures dans les biographies spirituelles françaises du XVIIe siècle." In *La Conversion au XVIIe siècle.* 317-35. Marseille.

Le Brun, Jacques. 1984. "Cancer serpit. Recherches sur la représentation du cancer dans les biographies spirituelles féminines du XVIIe siècle." *Sciences sociales et santé* 2, no. 2: 9-31.

Le Brun, Jacques. 1984. “L’institution et le corps, lieux de la mémoire, d’après les biographies spirituelles féminines du XVIIe siècle” *Corps écrit* (PUF) 11: 111-21.

Le Brun, Jacques. 1986. “À corps perdu. Les biographies féminines du XVIIe siècle.” In *Corps des dieux. Le Temps de la réflexion.* Paris.

Le Brun, Jacques. 2013. *Soeur et amante: les biographies spirituelles féminines du XVIIe siècle*. Geneva.

Le Martre, M. 1692. *La Vie mêlée, ou La vie de damoiselle Jeanne Biscot, fondatrice de la Société des Filles de Sainte-Agnès, d'Arras.* Valenciennes.

Lehfeldt, Elizabeth. 2005. *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister.* Aldershot.

Lierheimer, Linda. 2015. “False Sanctity and Spiritual Imposture in Seventeenth-Century French Convents.” In *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Kathryn A. Edwards. London.

Lowe, K. J. P. 2003. *Nuns Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy.* Cambridge.

Macek, Ellen. 2004. “'Ghostly Fathers’ and their ‘Virtuous Daughters’: The Role of Spiritual Direction in the Lives of Three Early Modern English Women.” *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 2.

Marsollier, Jacques 1700. *La Vie de St François de Sales, evêque et prince de Genève.* Paris.

Marsollier, Jacques 1703. *La Vie de Dom Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé.* Paris.

Marsollier, Jacques. 1714. *La Vie de la venerable mere de Chantal, fondatrice, prémiére religieuse, & prémiére supérieure de l'ordre de la Visitation de sainte Marie.* Paris.

Mazzonis, Querciolo. 2004. “A Female Idea of Religious Perfection: Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula (1535–1540).” *Renaissance Studies* 18, no. 3.

McHugh, Tim. 2006. "Establishing Medical Men at the Paris Hotel-Dieu,1500–1715." *Social History of Medicine* 19, no. 2.

McHugh, Tim. 2007 *Hospital Politics in Seventeenth-Century France: The Crown, Urban Elites and the Poor.* Aldershot.

Moore, Kathryn Blair. 2013. “The Disappearance of an Author and the Emergence of a Genre: Niccolò da Poggibonsi and Pilgrimage Guidebooks between Manuscript and Print.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 66, no. 2: 357-411.

Mostaccio, Silvia. 2015. "Shaping the Spiritual Exercises: the *Maisons des retraites* in Brittany during the Seventeenth Century as a Gendered Pastoral Tool." *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2: 659-684.

Nelson, Sarah, ed. and trans. 2008. *Memoirs: Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini.* Chicago.

Paige, Nicolas. 2001. “Enlightened (Il)literates: Problems of Gender and Authority in Early Modern Devotional Writing.” In *Rethinking Cultural Studies 2: Exemplary Essays*, edited David Lee Rubin and Julia V. Douthwaite. Charlottesville.

Patton, Elizabeth. 2011. “Dorothy Arundell’s *Acts of Father John Cornelius*: ‘We should hear from her, herself—she who left a record of it in these words’.” *ANQ* 24. nos. 1-2: 51-62.

Peake, Rose Marie. 2016. “The Daughters of Charity and Moral Management in seventeenth-century France: Creating Conservative Catholics, Securing Survival.” PhD diss., University of Helsinki.

Plessis, Jacqueline-Marie du. 1694. *La vie de la vénérable mère Louise-Eugénie de Fontaine Religieuse du Monastère de la Visitation de Sainte-Marie de Paris.* Paris.

Poutet, Yves. 2013. *Catherine de Bar, 1614-1698, mère Mectilde du Saint-Sacrement: moniale et fondatrice bénédictine au XVIIe siècle.* Paris.

Ranft, Patricia. 1994. "A Key to Counter-Reformation Women's Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10, no. 2: 7–26.

Rapley, Elizabeth. 2007. "'Un tresor enfoui, une lampe sous un boisseau:' Seventeenth-Century Visitandines Describe Their Vocation." In *The Cloister and the World: Early Modern Convent Voices*, edited by Thomas M. Carr. Charlottesville.

Robillard, Amy E. and Ron Fortune. 2016. *Authorship Contested: Cultural challenges to the authentic* autonomous author. London.

S. Martin de La Porte, Antoine de. 1650. *L'idée de la véritable et solide dévotion en la vie de Madame Beaufort-Ferrand.* Paris.

Saint-Sacrement, Paul du. 1669. *Idée de la véritable piété, en la vie, vertus et écrits de Damoiselle Marguerite Pignier.* Lyon.

Schapira, Nicholas. 2013. "Les lecteurs de La Vie de Michel de Marillac. Censure, témoignage, écriture au xviie siècle." *Les Dossiers du Grihl*, *La Vie de Michel de Marillac* et les expériences politiques du garde des sceaux, mis en ligne le 20 mai 2013, consulté le 16 février 2017. URL : http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/5415.

Schutte, Anne Jacobson. 2016. "Ecco la santa! Printed Italian Biographies of Devout Laywomen, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries." In *Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World*, edited by Alison Weber. London.

Seelig, Sharon Cadman. 2006. *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature, Reading Women's Lives 1600-1680.* Cambridge.

Sharpe, Kevin and Steven N. Zwicker, eds. 2008. *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England*. Oxford.

Sluhovsky, Moshe. 2007. *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism.* Chicago.

Smith, Sean Alexander. 2015. *Fealty and Fidelity: The Lazarists of Bourbon France, 1660-1736*. London.

Smoller, Laura Ackerman. 2014. *The Saint and the Chopped up Baby: The Cult of Vincent Ferrer in Medieval and Early Modern Europe.* London.

Strasser, Ulrike. 2008. "Clara Hortulana of Embach, Or How to Suffer Martyrdom in the Cloister." In *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: An Interdisciplinary View*. edited by Cordula Van Wyhe. Aldershot.

Suire, Éric. 2001. *La Sainteté Française de la réforme catholique (XVI-XVIII siècles d'après les textes hagiographiques et les procès de canonisation)* (Bordeaux, 2001)

Swaim, Kathleen M. 1992. "Come and Hear: Women's Puritan Evidences." In *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, edited by Margo Culley. Madison.

Vian, Louis. 1896. *Les Lamoignon: une vieille famille de robe.* Paris.

Walker, Claire. 2003. *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries.* Basingstoke.

Weber, Alison. _____. "Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World: The Historiographic Challenge." In *Devout Laywomen*.

Weber, Alison. 2013. "Literature by Women Religious in Early Modern Catholic Europe and the New World." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early*

Modern Europe, edited by Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver. London.

Zarri, Gabriella. 2001. “The Third Status.” In *Time, Space and Women's Lives Early Modern Europe*, edited by Anne Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi. 181-99. Kirksville.

12554 words